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ABSTRACT

The study's purpose was to: (1) describe the kind and extent of identification which members of one group of Alaskan Eskimos made with selected elements of the group's art heritage, (2) relate the foregoing to the problem of identity, and (3) state implications for curriculum development in schools serving Eskimo students. During July 1972, 62 Nunivak Island Eskimos of various ages were interviewed regarding their relationships with selected aspects of traditional arts. Subjects were divided into four age groups: 6-13, 14-25, 26-49, and 50 and over. Interviews were conducted in Cux (the Nunivak dialect of Yu'pik Eskimo) and in English. Responses were broken down into 72 items for analysis. Relationships between age groups and selected responses were examined. Questions dealing with comparisons of different Nunivak crafts were analyzed by the respondent's sex since some craft items were made mainly by members of one sex, and male and female respondents' outlook might differ regarding the crafts. Some findings were: (1) the older the respondent the more likely he was to recognize traditional art work and to have knowledge of its traditional use; and (2) members of each sex tended to place the most value on the crafts made primarily by members of that sex. (NQ)

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**ESKIMO IDENTIFICATION WITH TRADITIONAL ARTS
AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT:
INTERVIEWS WITH NUNIVAK ISLANDERS**

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Introduction

The search for identity is a universal human quest. Spindler has called it a constant process "...in all human beings as members of cultural systems." (Worbeck, 1968:335)

When differing cultures come into contact, the search for identity becomes critical among those who find themselves confronted with choices for which tradition has not prepared them. The identification process becomes acute. (Norbeck, 1968:335) Identity may become, as Erikson said, "...a universal psycho-social mechanism for adaptation in the face of change." (1964:92-93)

It has been said that education can increase identity conflict by forcing people to choose between two contrasting sets of values, role expectations, and models for identification or it can promote personal and cultural synthesis. (Sindell and Wintrob, 1969:8) The schools of the United States have often been accused of contributing to rather than alleviating identity conflict in minority group students. Although education has been philosophically committed to cultural plurality, national educational policy has been

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in actuality one of minimizing cultural differences and "Americanizing" all those who would be assimilated. (Haller, 1970:3)

According to some writers, schools serving Eskimo, Indian, and Aleut children in Alaska have followed this ethnocentric pattern. (Ray, Ryan, and Parker: 1962) It has been charged that in Alaska severe identity conflict in Native students has been the result. (Kleinfeld, 1971:9)

Some writers have suggested that one way in which the schools can help build the Native student's sense of identity is to recognize his considerable artistic heritage. (Frederick, 1970:309) Teachers have long praised the drawing ability of their Native students, (Kleinfeld: 1970:17) and yet, Indian and Eskimo history has not been included in the curriculum of many Alaskan schools. Few children see examples of the aboriginal art of their people. (Kuh, 1966:31)

Surveys in Bethel, the largest settlement on the southwestern tundra, indicated that although most teachers were in favor of incorporating aspects of local culture into the curriculum, most had little understanding of what the local culture was. (Birchard, 1970:5) Apparently no study has been undertaken which would clarify the relationship of present day Eskimos to what is known of their artistic heritage. Demands for cultural heritage programs seem to indicate an interest in the study of artistic heritage; but is there reason to believe that present day Eskimos might relate this heritage to their sense of identity?

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study were to (1) describe the kind and extent of identification which members of one group of Alaskan Eskimos made with selected elements of the group's art heritage, (2) relate the foregoing to the problem of identity, and (3) state implications for curriculum development in schools serving Eskimo students.

Development of an Interview Schedule

In order to carry out these three purposes, an interview schedule was developed for use with a particular group of Eskimo people; the residents of Nunivak Island. It was assumed that cultural identity is a part of personal identity and the study dealt only with that portion. The following definitions of identity from Erikson were used as a basis for the interview schedule:

(1) Identity "...points to an individual's link with the unique values fostered by a unique history of his people." (Stein, Vidich, and White; 1960:54) (Erikson, 1959:102)

(2) Identity involves the matching of "...something in the individual's core with an essential aspect of the group's inner coherence." (Erikson, 1959:102)

The term "identification" refers to the manner and degree in which a member of a given cultural group accepts something as being part of his group's history and value structure and as part of himself.

The following kinds of evidence were accepted as indications that the interviewee included selected elements of his group's art heritage as part of his sense of identity:

- (1) The interviewee expressed knowledge of art objects and any accompanying story, dance, or song.
- (2) The interviewee indicated that the object had had a function in his personal history.
- (3) The interviewee assigned some kind of value to the object.
- (4) The interviewee indicated that he associated the item with his family, community, or ethnic group in terms of knowledge, function, or valuing.

A list of twenty-eight questions which related to Erikson's definition of identity was prepared. The questions were grouped into the knowledge, function, valuing, and associations categories mentioned above and tentative categories of responses were developed.

The literature showed that this particular part of the world was a center for excellent ivory carving, wooden dish, utensil, and mask making in the nineteenth century and, to some extent, in the early years of this century. The women's crafts of basket making and skin sewing developed and persist the present. Little is known of prehistoric art in this region and there are no comprehensive studies of any craft of the area other than mask making, although information can be drawn from a variety of sources to give a general picture. Examples of all of these arts exist in photographs and in

various museums throughout the world. Due to its relative isolation, the traditional way of life on Nunivak Island was not seriously threatened until after 1940. As a result, more has been written about Nunivak arts than about most others in the Southwest Alaskan area.

To facilitate questioning, the following items were taken to the field for use during the interviews:

1. A fox-man or "ircik" mask made on Nunivak Island about 1950.
2. A group of fourteen photographs of Nunivak and other southwest Alaska Eskimo masks dating from the mid-nineteenth century to 1969.
3. A burned face seal net float believed to have been carved around 1870.
4. A group of five pencil sketches of Eskimo people working on crafts of Nunivak Island. They showed (a) a man painting a nearly completed walrus mask, (b) a man working on an ivory tusk with a completed deep-carved ivory tusk in the foreground, (c) a man painting a seal-shaped wooden dish with an "X-ray view" of a seal painted in the center of the dish, (d) a woman and young girl sewing skins, and (e) a woman sewing a coil of grass.

A pilot study was conducted in the field.

Subjects

The subjects of this study consisted of sixty-two Eskimo people who were living on Nunivak Island during July of 1972. This was the equivalent of 24.9 percent of the total population according to the 1970 U. S. Government

census. Every person six years of age or older who was available during the time of the study was interviewed.

Interview Procedures

Interviews were conducted in a variety of locations; the writer's rented house at Mekoryuk, sod huts and tents at fish camps, and in various homes in Mekoryuk. Fifty of the interviews were preserved on audio tape. Notes were taken by the writer during all of the interviews. Eighteen interviews were conducted in Cux, the Nunivak dialect of Yu'pik Eskimo, with the assistance of a hired interpreter. The others were conducted in English. Interviewees were paid for their participation.

Analysis of the Data

The responses to the interview questions were broken down into seventy-two items for analysis. The subjects were divided by age into the following four groups: Group A, ages 6-13, 20 subjects; Group B, ages 14-25, 14 subjects; Group C, ages 26-49, 16 subjects; and Group D, ages 50 and over, 17 subjects.

The categories of response for each question in the interview were arranged to get at the issue of identity in keeping with Erikson's definition. The number of responses in the various categories was expressed in percentages. Relationships between age groups and selected responses were examined. Questions dealing with comparisons of different Nunivak crafts were analyzed by the sex of the interviewees because some items were

made principally by members of one sex, and male and female interviewees consequently might have differing outlooks in regard to the crafts.

Results

The results can be summarized as follows:

1. The older the interviewee the more likely he was to recognize traditional art work and to have knowledge of its traditional use. The old people were acknowledged as the authorities in these matters. It was apparent that craft skills were not being passed on to the younger generations. Although most of the interviewees did some type of craft work, only the older ones were inclined toward the traditional crafts included in this study. More females than males did some type of crafts work.

2. Masks which were close in appearance to recent Nunivak masks were recognized by more people than other styles, and, in fact, response to older area-wide styles was slight. There was no important sex difference in the number of people who recognized the different masks.

3. The masks and the seal net buoy were not functional at the time of the study and had not been so for many years. Only the oldest interviewees had experienced these items as functional. Wooden ware was apparently not in use at all at the time of the study and ivory objects were no longer produced primarily for local use. Grass work was still done partly for use and the other women's craft, skin sewing, was found to be the most functional of all the traditional crafts at the time of the study. The men's crafts of wood and ivory carving were still functional in the lives of many people.

4. Members of each sex tended to place the most value on the crafts made primarily by members of that sex. Crafts were termed important in the following order, from the most important to the least important: mask making, skin sewing, grass work, ivory carving, and wooden dish and utensil making. The crafts made primarily by men, (masks, ivory, and wooden ware) were termed important mainly for their economic (sale) value whereas the crafts made by women, grass work and skin sewing, were made both for economic and utilitarian values. Most people placed positive values on the aspects of cultural heritage included in this study by saying that they wanted the children to learn about them. Interviewees indicated very little belief that the children would ever sell or use the craft items and placed more emphasis on group identity values.

5. The most strongly expressed ethno-cultural associations were with the culture and people of Nunivak Island. The next most strongly expressed associations were with other Eskimo communities. In most cases, when an interviewee recognized an item or said he had knowledge of a traditional activity, he associated it with Nunivak Island. There was little evidence of any basis for association with older area-wide mask styles.

6. Most people approved of intercultural sharing of Nunivak traditional arts and activities with other Eskimo villages, and, although to a lesser extent, with White children. Nunivakers wanted Nunivak children to be taught about Nunivak things by Nunivak people.

Conclusions and Discussion

The evidence from the interviews and the review of the literature indicated a pattern of changing values which have been associated with the crafts over the last one hundred years. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the crafts were made for use within Eskimo culture. They had utilitarian value as opposed to economic or sale/trade value.

When local materials, religion, and social practices were replaced with materials and ideas from the "outside," and Nunivakers became involved in the souvenir trade in this century, many crafts lost much of their utilitarian value. At the same time that manufactured items became available, a market for craft items opened and the crafts could then be traded for goods or sold for money. At that time, probably beginning in the 1920's, the reasons for making many of the crafts objects became less for personal or family use than for sale or trade to outsiders. The crafts can be said to have gained an economic value which they did not have before.

Now, indications are that this value, too, may be disappearing as the older people who know how to produce these things pass from the scene and other ways to obtain cash become available. For example, most of the interviewees had no real expectations that the village children would ever make crafts either for their own use or for sale, and yet, they nearly all wanted the children to know about them. These things seemed to be gaining a new importance, not because they were to be used or sold, but solely because they were identified as Nunivak Eskimo things. The emerging

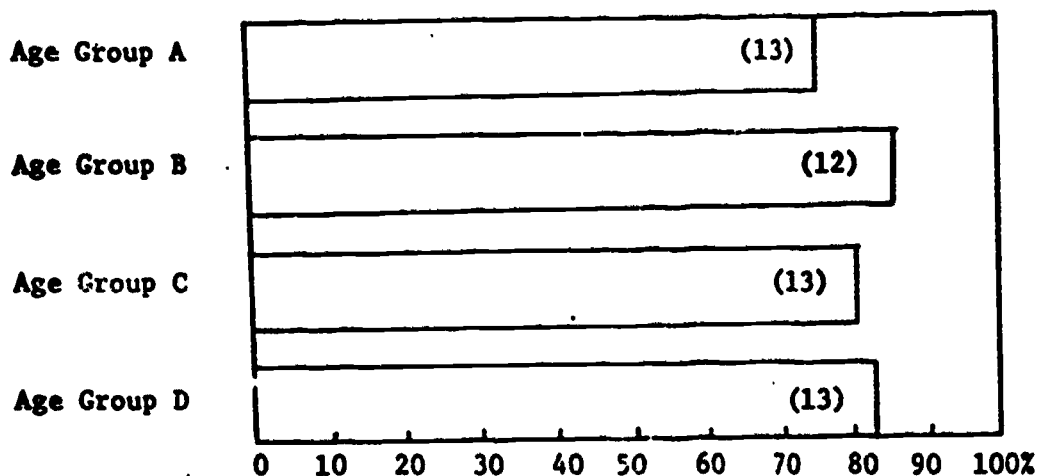


Figure 1

**Interviewees Who Stated that Nunivak
Children Should Learn About
the Arts and Activities
Included in the Study**

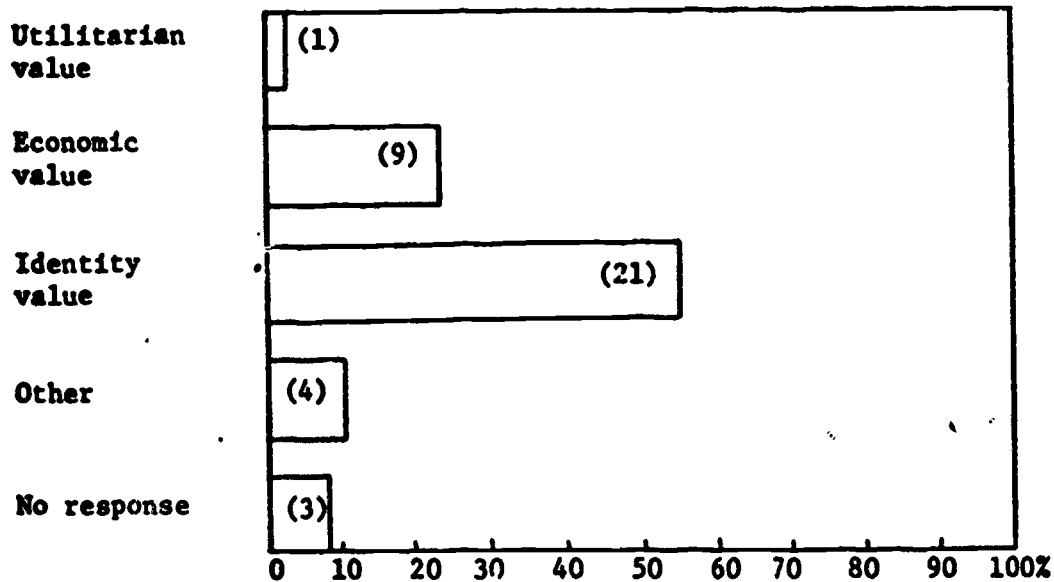


Figure 2

**Values Expressed in Response to the
Question, "Why Do You Think Nunivak
Children Should Learn
About These Things?"
(Groups B, C, and D only)**

value which was being applied to the crafts was an ethno-cultural identity value. It cannot be said that this type of value was not previously attached to the items; that is, that they were not valued for their "Nunivakness," or their "Eskimeness," but in traditional times there was no pressure to make an issue of it. In precontact and early contact times, the local value system was not placed in jeopardy by outside forces. The issue of ethno-cultural "identity" had no meaning when nearly everyone, regardless of whether Mainlander or Islander, subscribed to essentially the same cultural patterns and system of values.

The reasons for the new valuing of Nunivak Eskimo things by Nunivak Eskimos may be speculated upon. Perhaps publicity concerning minority rights from the "outside" or the political climate involving the Native Land Claims issues has affected local opinion. It may be that changed attitudes of some personnel in agencies and institutions toward Native cultural heritage and accompanying grants for studies and programs have had their influence. Or, perhaps increased sophistication on the part of residents in regard to the effects of "acculturation" on the local value system has occurred. Most likely, a combination of events and circumstances has stimulated thinking which has led to the new valuing of Nunivak arts.

Whatever the causes, certainly a question is raised in regard to the inter-relationships of the categories of identity which were employed in the development of the interview schedule and the analysis of the data. If an interviewee knew nothing about the crafts, if he had never used them,

and therefore had no basis of association with his ethno-cultural group until the interviewer appeared on the scene, and told him that these were Nunivak or Eskimo things, how could these things be a part of his identity, a concept which Erikson spoke of as being an "irreversible historical fact" (1968:11) or the basis of the feeling, "I am," or "I exist?" (Cohen and Brawer, 1972:10) The answer may be that if he had already established the category of "Eskimo things" or "Nunivak things" as valuable, and as a part of himself, then he needed only to learn that a piece of craft work belonged to the valued category in order to value and accept it. Certainly the older people, who had known these objects as parts of their lives, could be said to identify more closely and automatically with some of the arts and crafts, but the desire of the younger people not to lose these things, even when it is obvious that the crafts mean little to them in terms of their practical, everyday lives, is not to be discounted.

Also, it would appear that an element of choice is possible in identification with a group of people or the things that one associates with that group. Erikson seemed to agree that the inclusion of things in one's identity or the things one identifies with can come from conscious choice although this will often be done in response to pressures that threaten one's basic value system. (1964:93) Fitzgerald discussed a related phenomenon in his inquiry into the complexity of acculturation processes and the Maori of New Zealand. He implied that although one may never have experienced aspects of a given

cultural heritage, he may make them a part of his ethnic identity, even to having the identity without the culture. (1970:14) And, indeed, this would seem to be so. If, in the early thirties, the Nunavagmiut "threw their idols into the sea," as one Christian missionary claims, (Almquist, 1962:52) and in 1972 they told the interviewer that they wanted their children to be taught about the traditional Nunivak things, then choice seems possible, however it might be influenced by historical pressure.

A critic of this change in viewpoint might point out that people always cling sentimentally to a way of life that is passing before they give it up for good. Erikson might, judging from some of his comments on similar subjects, be inclined to say that the Nunivak people, threatened with the rush of acculturative influences now hope to bolster a tentative sense of centrality or ethno-cultural self with things that are no longer relevant to their everyday lives. He might even wonder whether they are attempting to maintain a "synthetic" identity. What seems important to this writer is that the individual accepts himself and his own background, ethno-cultural, or otherwise, and successfully integrates it into his personal whole. A sense of belonging to a shared past and a shared future with the group with which one associates himself would most likely facilitate this integration.

The problem is that Nunivakers have grown to adulthood in a culture which has traditionally passed on its values, history, and religion by means of observation and the oral tradition. With the observable traditional activities partially gone and the oral tradition interrupted by Western

schooling, it is very difficult for Nunivak young people and children, under present circumstances to learn much about their own history which could be integrated into a personal whole. To complicate the situation, Nunivakers who complete eighth grade usually go on to a boarding school away from home for their high school years. Hertzberg, in discussing the problem of Indian identity, mentioned in this respect the loss of a "usable past." (1971:324) In the case of the Nunivakers, the mechanism for transmitting the Eskimo past has been displaced by a mechanism which transmits other content. That content is the heritage and value system of their cultural "in-laws," the members of the dominant national culture.

However, as shown in the interview results, there now exists a conviction among the Nunivakers that there is an Eskimo cultural heritage, although what that heritage is does not seem to be entirely clear, either to many of the Nunivakers or to those who have written about them. Most interviewees felt that whatever it is is tied in some way to the old people in the village and embodied in their memories and skills. Along with this is a strong desire to have those things which are identified as being "Eskimo" valued and respected and taught to the younger Nunivakers, regardless of the antiquity of the objects or traditions.

• Implications for Curriculum Development and Teaching

The strongest implication of this study is that the younger people should learn about traditional Nunivak arts--and secondly--that the village schools might well have a role in accomplishing this. One must think carefully about what that role might be. It is a temptation to recommend that the village school immediately begin to teach Eskimo history, arts and crafts, and other aspects of Eskimo cultural heritage. However, it would be wise to think of what the interviewees said in response to the question, "Who do you think knows the most about these things?" The old people in the village were cited as the authorities and were the ones which a substantial proportion of the interviewees wanted to teach the children. Because the concept of identity appears to be a subjective reality, special attention must be given to felt and perceived needs in this respect.

Also, while some teachers have read and studied Eskimo history, the teacher's access to knowledge of such matters is likely to be largely that which is available in the literature, and the available literature seems to this writer to be both limited in detail and written from the interested and often sympathetic, but never the less ethnocentric viewpoint of people who were not a part of the culture about which they were writing. Their records may be of value in explaining Nunivak arts to outsiders or in organizing materials, but should not be used as the sole source of information when

knowledgeable older people who grew to adulthood within the traditional culture are available. An exception to that might be the presentation of traditional arts, for example, nineteenth century masks, which no longer exist in the village.

It is this writer's recommendations that the following guidelines be utilized for the teaching of Eskimo arts on Nunivak Island and other places in similar cultural circumstances:

1. In the formal school situation, Eskimo arts should be given their own place in the curriculum. A cultural heritage program need not be limited to the items discussed in the study. They were intended to be only representative of traditional arts. Nunivak Islanders have produced a wide variety of items which were part of the material culture as well as stories, dances, games, and songs which were not specifically mentioned in the literature but which are still known to at least some villagers.

2. The stance of the school system, the university, or any other agencies or organizations working in the area of cultural heritage should be facilitating rather than directive. Educational organizations should provide the mechanism whereby the most likely environment for the teaching of knowledge and appreciation of the traditional arts would be fostered, but the choice of whether or not to pursue this or that approach should be left up to the people in the village and the local school boards. Some things cannot be decided at all by outsiders. For example, one factor which

complicates any scheme for teaching Eskimo arts is the matter of current religious beliefs and resulting attitudes toward the pre-Christian use of the masks. The masks and dances had a central role in traditional Eskimo religious ceremony. Any person who deals with cultural heritage studies must be careful to take into consideration local sensitivity to the traditional symbolism and function of masks and dances.

3. Whenever possible, older village people should be employed to teach younger people about these things. Responses to the interview schedule indicated that an initial effort on the part of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to do just this thing was well-received at Mekoryuk. Since there seems to be an existing consensus as to which people in the village know the most about the various "old time things," it should not be difficult for the advisory school board to identify appropriate teachers.

School teacher aides and other regularly employed paraprofessionals could be responsible for part of the presentation and organizing of the local Eskimo arts program because they often give a continuity to the school program by their year to year presence and they are closely attuned to community feelings.

4. Curriculum materials should be developed which will be supportive of the teaching of cultural heritage. The schools can present some things which have been collected by early explorers, missionaries, and anthropologists and are beyond the memory of the old people. A danger of distortion lies in the translation from the oral to the written tradition in stories and

history, and from the three dimensional craft with a decorated surface to the photograph or drawing on the flat page and from the use of Yu'pik to English. However, within the present circumstances, this is partially unavoidable and it is mentioned as a caution against a callous wholesale presentation of stories and art work in printed form under the belief that this is totally capturing anyone's "cultural heritage." In general, materials should be presented as directly and as close to their original forms as possible.

5. The attitude of the school personnel should be neither condescending toward Eskimo arts nor should teachers insist that students do or study only Eskimo art. One of the most helpful functions of the school in this regard is that it can help show students the rightful and unique place which Eskimo arts hold in world art. Teachers should encourage an integrated viewpoint rather than suggest that there is an either-or choice to be made.

Implications for Further Research

1. Research components should be written into cultural heritage programs. The focus of the research should be on an enhanced sense of identity and would probably best be done by field methods which involve participant observation procedures. Local school personnel, including paraprofessionals, could employ these procedures in an informal manner or community members might like to be trained and utilized.

The basis of the evaluation might well be the four aspects of identity and identification which were used in this study; knowledge, function, valuing, and association. The interview schedule could be modified to make it specific to whatever materials would be taught and to the age group in the elementary school. It should be fairly easy, through the use of simple questions, to find out whether or not the children know anything about what they have been taught, whether they care anything about it, whether it has any place in their lives beyond school, and whether or not they think of it as related to their own community.

2. There is still a need for further research for materials development and for scope and sequence in developing a cultural heritage curriculum. Very little has been written, for example, about the women's crafts of grass basketry and skin sewing. Also, further investigation might show that there is a culturally natural sequence for teaching craft skills so that certain kinds of things would be taught to some age groups and other kinds of things to other age groups.

3. Some comparative studies might be done concerning this particular group of Eskimo people and other groups whose traditional basis of identity has been threatened or obliterated. It may be that there are some unique things about the Alaskan situation including the rise of an interest in cultural heritage studies at a time when some of the traditional life style is still intact. Attitudes toward ethno-cultural identity in different groups

might be compared. Another kind of comparison might also be made. If young Nunivakers have no sense of a Nunivak past beyond their parents, whose own information may be limited, how are their attitudes toward themselves as members of a group different from young people who have had their racial and cultural histories taught to them and reinforced by the total environment of home, school, religious institution, and popular culture?

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